

CLASSIFICATION

CLASSIFICATION PROGRAM FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Every employee of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is affected by the Federal Government's position classification program. For this reason, employees should know how the program. Here are some of the most frequently asked questions and their answers.

Background

The statutory authority for the classification program is U.S. Code Title 5 Chapter 51.

The fundamental objectives of a classification program are:

1. Pay will be based on the principle of equal pay for substantially equal work.
2. Differences in pay should be in proportion to substantial differences in difficulty, responsibility, and qualification requirements of the work performed.
3. The position classification plan should facilitate all phases of personnel administration.

Questions and Answers

Q. What is position classification and why do we need it?

A. Position classification is the process of obtaining job facts—what is expected on the job—recording these facts, analyzing them, and applying standard criteria to determine a proper title, series, and grade for positions. A properly classified position then serves as a basis for recruitment and staffing, performance evaluation, employee relations and employee development. The position classification system works when managers, employees, and classification specialists work cooperatively in the process.

Q. What is a position description?

A. The position description, sometimes referred to as a "PD," is an official record of the duties and responsibilities assigned by management, certified by the immediate supervisor and classified by the Personnel Office.

Q. Why do I need a position description?

A. A written position description of the major duties and responsibilities is required by U.S. Code Title 5 Chapter 51. It is an essential document that is used to facilitate such personnel management and administration actions as pay, placement, recruitment, training, performance and reduction-in-force.

Q. Do employees get a copy of their position description?

A. Yes. Employees should receive a copy of their position description at the time of appointment and whenever any changes are made to the assigned major duties and responsibilities.

Q. When should my position description be rewritten?

A. Your position description should be rewritten whenever your supervisor makes significant changes in your major duties and responsibilities.

Q. Can employees participate in the rewriting of their position description?

A. Yes. Employees should be encouraged to assist in the rewriting of their position descriptions just as they should participate in their annual performance plan which is derived from the position description. However, the final decision on position description content rests with their supervisor.

Q. What are Standards?

A. Position classification standards are official evaluation guides published by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management. These standards are used in determining the appropriate title, series, and grade of all positions (i.e., General Schedule (GS), Wage Grade (WG)). Currently there are two types of standards; Narrative and FES. All of the OPM standards are available on the Personnel WEB site under classification.

Q. What is a Narrative Standard?

A. A Narrative Standard uses evaluation criteria specific to the occupation it covers. Thus, different criteria are needed to evaluate positions in different occupations with narrative standards. The Narrative Standard method can be applied to certain non-supervisory General Schedule positions ranging from GS-1 through GS-15 as well as all Wage Grade positions.

Q. What is FES?

A. FES, or Factor Evaluation System, is a method for evaluating positions using nine separate factors. The same nine factors are used to evaluate all positions covered by FES standards. The position description includes a statement describing each factor which is measure against a classification standard in the same format. The nine factors are:

1. Knowledge required by the position
2. Supervisory controls
3. Guidelines for the work
4. Complexity of the work
5. Scope and effect of the work
6. Personal contacts
7. Purpose of contacts
8. Physical demands
9. Work environment

The FES method can be applied to certain non-supervisory General Schedule positions ranging from GS-1 through GS-15.

Q. What is a classification desk audit?

A. A desk audit is a fact-finding interview conducted by a Position Classification Specialist typically at the employee's work site if practical. Due to the wide dispersion of Region 6 personnel, a desk audit questionnaire is often used to meet this requirement. The purpose of the desk audit is to gain a better understanding of the employee's major duties and responsibilities to ensure accurate classification.

Q. How should I prepare for a desk audit?

A. You should be prepared to discuss your major duties and responsibilities as well as the nine factors in your position description with the classifier. Seven rules for a successful desk audit preparation are:

1. Review your existing position description to determine if any changes should be made too more accurately reflect what you are now doing.

2. Discuss any proposed changes with your supervisor before the audit, and finalize a list of your major duties.
3. Prepare an outline to include examples of your major work products to discuss with the classifier (e.g., reports, studies, completed work orders, etc.)
4. Make a list of whom you contact outside your work area and be able to explain why you make such contacts.
5. Be prepared to explain how your work relates to the work of others both in and out of your work area.
6. Be prepared to explain how and for what purpose your work is reviewed and, in addition, how much supervisory assistance is provided.
7. Be able to give percentage of time spent on major duties.

Q. Who is responsible for maintaining the accuracy of my position description and what procedures are used for requesting a desk audit?

A. You're immediate supervisor and the Personnel Office. When your supervisor decides to change the major duties and/or responsibilities of your position. Your supervisor should contact the Personnel Office. The Personnel Office can provide guidance needed to determine whether the changes(s) warrant reclassification of your position. Periodically, the Personnel Office reviews positions to determine whether they are current and accurate (Recent studies done for Wage Grade and Administrative positions Region-wide). Also, if employees feel their position description is not current they can bring it to the attention of their immediate supervisor.

Q. May I appeal the classification of my job and, if so, when is this permissible?

A. Yes. Any employee may appeal the pay plan (GS or WG), series and/or grade of his or her position of record at any time. You may obtain advice and assistance on the procedures for an appeal from your servicing Personnel Office.

Q. How are "official" position titles and series derived?

A. Position Classification Standards define the various classes of positions that exist in the Federal service in terms of duties, responsibilities, and qualification requirements, and as a result, establish the official class titles and series.

Q. What is the basis for "organizational" titles?

A. Organizational titles can be used in addition to official title for the purpose of further identifying the position (e.g., Criminal Investigator is used as the official title whereas Special Agent may be used as the organizational title which further distinguishes the generic title of Criminal Investigator.)

Q. If the Personnel Office classifies my position to a higher grade, when would it be effective and may I receive retroactive pay for the full period of time I performed the higher level duties?

A. The action would be effective on the first day of the first pay period following the final classification determination by the Personnel Office. Reclassification to a higher grade may not be used as a basis for retroactive pay.

Q. May I see the standards used to classify my job?

A. Yes. The standards are maintained in the Personnel Office and you can access them through the Personnel WEB site as well.

Q. How is my position description related to my annual performance rating?

A. The official position description is used to develop the performance plan on which an employee is evaluated and receives an annual rating.

Q. Am I required to perform tasks which are not specifically spelled out in my official position description?

A. Yes. Contrary to popular myth you may be assigned tasks that are not specifically spelled out in your position description. The position description should depict the major or grade controlling duties assigned to your job. It does not necessarily identify all possible work variations or tasks necessary to accomplish your work. Tasks not specifically mentioned in your position description are considered "other related duties" or minor duties (i.e., less than 10% of time).

If you need assistance in the area of classification contact either Mike Perkins or Mary Johnson in the Servicing Personnel Office at (303) 236-5414.